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SUBJECT: NORTHERN NOTES - MARCH 2008

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Following is a summary of recent political and economic developments in northern Greece:

PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS ON MACEDONIA NAME ISSUE

[1](#)1. At the beginning of the month, a poll published in the Sunday edition of local Makedonia, suggested that 92.7% of Thessaloniki residents would support the use of a veto by the Greek government vis-à-vis the Republic of Macedonia's accession to the EU and NATO, in the absence of a mutually accepted solution to the name issue. On March 05, two rallies were organized in Thessaloniki on the issue. One was led by academic Costas Zouraris, politician Stelios Papathemelis, and Metropolitan of Thessaloniki Anthimos, and the other by the far-right LAOS party (Ref A.) Both rallies were peaceful and modestly attended (about 6,000 people attended each.) Speakers criticized the government and called for a firmer stance in name negotiations. Greek Independence Day (March 25) celebrations included nationalistic appeals on the name issue, including speeches and a parade at the border (with Republic of Macedonia) village of Evzoni (Ref B.) About 40 students from two Thessaloniki elementary schools were transported to the border to march in the parade there and parading soldiers shouted defiant slogans regarding the name issue. The event was attended by around 100 people.

NUMBERS OF TIP ARRESTS, IDENTIFIED TRAFFICKING VICTIMS DECLINE IN 2007

[1](#)2. Local media reported that according to Hellenic Police data, four trafficking victims were identified and 26 traffickers arrested in Thessaloniki in 2007, compared to seven victims and 66 traffickers in 2006. The local Stability Pact office confirmed the figures with regard to the victims. In a high-profile trafficking case, a former mayor of the town of Sapes (Rodopi, Thrace) was sentenced to two years in prison for bribery and breach of duty. Along with several others, he was found guilty for his role in the issuing of 173 fraudulent documents, some of which facilitated the stay in the country of female prostitutes (Ref C.) In a nationwide survey conducted by Amnesty International, 62% of Greeks held the victims of trafficking partly responsible for their predicament, as they "use fake documents," often "work as prostitutes" and "do not co-operate with the police for the arrest of their traffickers."

ANTI-NATO, ANTI-U.S. PROTESTS OUTSIDE THE U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL

13. In mid-March, a demonstration organized by PAME (labor union affiliated with the Communist Party of Greece) to protest the pension fund reform bill, stopped in front of the U.S. Consulate General in Thessaloniki. Around 10,000 demonstrators shouted anti-American slogans and then dispersed peacefully. On March 24 another demonstration, this time marking the 9th anniversary of the NATO bombings in former Yugoslavia, was organized outside the Consulate. About 200 participants shouted anti-American slogans and then left without incident. Earlier in the day, a photo exhibition of the bombings was held on the sidewalk outside the Consulate and flyers asking for the "withdrawal of occupation armies from the region" were distributed.

COUPLE ARRESTED IN THESSALONIKI FOR CD AND DVD PIRACY

14. Local media reported this month that a couple was arrested in west Thessaloniki for CD and DVD piracy. The man was copying the discs at home and his wife was selling them through her store. A total of 1,056 DVDs, 3,783 CDs, 1,979 PC games, 651 Play Station disks and 2,044 pirated covers were found in their possession and confiscated. Industry sources confirmed to post the accuracy of the report.

HUGE LOSSES FOR BUSINESSES DUE TO WORK SLOWDOWN AT THE PORT OF THESSALONIKI; PRIVATISATION BILL IS RATIFIED BY PARLIAMENT

15. On March 12, Parliament passed a bill authorizing private long-term leasing of the Thessaloniki (and Piraeus) Cargo Station. Only New Democracy representatives in Parliament voted in favor, while the parties of the opposition spoke of a "scandalous give-away of national assets." According to Thessaloniki's prefect, a crippling work slowdown by port workers protesting the privatization of the port's cargo handling operation caused losses of about 1.2 million euros in January for the port. The slowdown also forced exporters to use neighboring countries' ports, in order to deliver their products in time. Despite assurances from the Port Authority that every effort is being made to keep it operating, 226 Northern Greek businesses sent a protest letter warning of a lawsuit to the Thessaloniki Port Authority, accusing it of not acting effectively and thus creating huge financial losses. The

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bidding process for the Thessaloniki Cargo Station was extended to May 15.

STRIKES IN PROTEST OF PENSION REFORM LEAVE GARBAGE IN STREETS AND CREATE POWER BLACKOUTS

16. The Mayor of Thessaloniki V. Papageorgopoulos caused a stir during a session of the Municipal Council, when he described local strikes as "politically motivated." Thessaloniki, along with most of Greece, has been badly affected by recent strikes in both the public and private sectors, in reaction to the introduction of a bill for the reform of pension funds. Rolling power black outs and piles of garbage on the streets have been the resultant problems attracting the most attention, in a situation that is likely to repeat itself in the future.

ECHR RULES AGAINST GREECE'S RESTRICTION ON TURKISH NAME

17. The European Court of Human Rights unanimously upheld on March 27 that Greece had violated Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association) of the European Convention of Human Rights, by refusing to grant legal status to two Muslim minority associations in Thrace whose names include the word "Turkish". Since 1984, Greek courts have refused to register the "Turkish Association of Xanthi" and the "Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi", on the grounds that the Treaty of Lausanne recognized only a Muslim -as opposed to Turkish- minority in the region. The Greek Court of Appeal of Komotini claimed thus -in two separately tried cases-, that the titles of the associations ran counter to public policy. Members of the associations brought the case to the European Court in 2005.

The Court awarded the "Turkish Association of Xanthi" compensation of 8,000, as there was also acknowledgement of violation of Article 6, par.1 (right to a fair hearing within a reasonable time). The Greek government has three months to appeal the Court's decision.
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